

D.C. panel will review Libby work

SDMS Document ID



2032366

Special to the Inter Lake

LIBBY — A subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will hold a hearing on May 2 to review Environmental Protection Agency activities in Libby.

Meeting at the request of U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., the panel will discuss ongoing cleanup work in Libby and a pending decision on declaring a public health emergency.

The hearing is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. in Washington, D.C., before the Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk and Waste Management.

EPA administrator Christie Whitman has been invited to discuss the agency's plan to remove asbestos-contaminated Zonolite insulation from homes in Libby.

The EPA is currently deciding whether to declare a public health emergency in Libby due to widespread use of Zonolite insulation. Under the Superfund program, the designation would allow the agency to obtain funding to remove the insulation from an estimated 800 homes and other buildings in the area.

"I hope that Administrator Whitman will announce a public health emergency at the Senate hearing, or even sooner," Baucus said. "It's past time that we protect those folks from any further asbestos exposure."

Baucus said he would continue to work with the administration and Congress to ensure the cleanup process moves ahead quickly.

"The cleanup is important to Libby residents, and also for the economic health of Libby and Lincoln County," he said.

In February, the EPA proposed Libby for the Superfund National Priorities List. The listing is currently open for public comment, with a final decision expected this summer.

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APR 25 2003

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